WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS
Published occasionally by the Washtenaw Historical Society, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Vol. 14, No. 6 April, 1963

Contents

Victorian America, by Louis W. Doll
The Dixboro Ghost, by Russell E. Bidlack
The Skeleton in the Wall, by Russell E. Bidlack

Victorian America

A Study of Chapman & Co.'s History of Washtenaw County, 1881

by Louis W. Doll

A paper which formed the basis of a talk before the Society, April 27, 1962. (The paper was enriched by many quotations from the 1881 History, to illustrate various points. Most of these quotations we regretfully omit here. -Ed.)

In the late seventies and early eighties of the last century, there were a number of firms in the middle west which made a business of promoting the writing and publishing of county histories. One of them was C. C. Chapman & Co., of Chicago, who in 1881 produced a History of Washtenaw County. They seem to have done two other Michigan counties, Kent and Saginaw; and an apparently related firm, Chapman Bros., did an even larger business of publishing this type of thing, but with more emphasis on the biographical phases.

One of the most interesting of these county histories is that of Washtenaw. My personal interest in this massive book (1452 pages) derives first from my own birth in Washtenaw County, then from my interest in local history from a professional standpoint, and finally from my assuming responsibility for the indexing of this book to make its information more easily accessible. This index was begun just before the war (in this case World War II, not the war of the History itself), and was about half completed when I entered military service in 1942. At this point the work of indexing was picked up and carried on to completion by Miss Geneva Smithe. The Michigan State Library was anxious to have the use of the index and offered to type it for us, an offer gratefully accepted. It was decided to break the index into two parts, the first, covering pages 1-799 of the text, has been typed, and the several copies placed in Michigan repositories. The original manuscript slips for the second half of the index survived the fire in the State Office Building in Lansing in 1951, is still awaiting final typing, but is available for use in the Michigan Section of the State Library.*

This History is probably better than most of such county histories for the reason that Washtenaw County contained the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and the Normal School at Ypsilanti, of both of which institutions of higher learning the citizens of the county were so proud. The editors drew on the talents of the educated men there. Among the signed articles are two by University professors: "The Geology of Washtenaw County," by Alexander Winchell, and "The University of

---

* Since the reading of this paper in April, Part 2 of this Index has been completed by the State Library, and bound copies deposited in the Michigan Historical Collections of the University, and in the Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library.

Michigan," by the famous Charles Kendall Adams. The whole book is certainly influenced by the fact that the community contained a large number of people of exceptionally high intellectual calibre and with excellent education. The distinctive flavor of the book makes it intensely interesting in spots, and good reading in others, while it is a rare piece that is wholly lacking in readability.

The book begins with an introductory section of 112 pages on Michigan history, dealing with separate aspects of the state's history and institutions. While this section is satisfactorily written, it is definitely "duty" work and is not inspired writing except in parts. It closes with a long transitional paragraph describing a log-cabin home at its best. (pp. 111-2)

The next section, pages 115 to 871, deals with the general history of Washtenaw County, and is divided topically. Next come the sections dealing with the twenty separate townships, in each of which the histories of the cities and villages lying therein are included; and at the end of each are the "township biographies" and brief sketches of the prominent men of the townships. When this book was compiled, of course, there were many men and women still alive and vigorous who remembered well when the "county was beautiful in its natural state," and nothing but a "lovely wilderness."

The information to be found in this book, both as to quantity and quality, is nothing less than astounding. Its organization makes it particularly difficult to use, as related material is scattered all through the book and has to be brought together by an index. In spite of the enormous size of the book, it is not complete. I have heard it commented by Washtenaw people that "if it isn't in Chapman, it didn't happen." This is not the case. For one thing, the book is based to a large extent on human memory, which is not infallible, and this accounts not only for some of the mistakes and contradictions, but also for some of the lack of completeness. Some things have simply been forgotten, as have some people who moved away or died and left no progeny in the community. On still another count the book is incomplete: there were definite things that these people thought should not go into a book. As this is one of its distinctive features, it will be examined further, later in this paper.

Interesting as this book is from an historian's standpoint, as a mine of information, it is not that aspect nor any critical analysis of the book that is of concern here. The work was completed in 1881, in the late middle of that period known as Victorian. The ideas and ideals of the people who wrote it, who gave the information about themselves, their surroundings and their past, have left their impress upon it. This is therefore a study of their point of view.

These people were Victorians, but they were American Victorians, which means intensely American. They were proud of themselves, their achievements, their work, their community, and their country. It was this very pride that caused them to be so anxious to record all that we read here, and in fact gave rise to the history itself. They, our own not very distant ancestors, were intensely proud of their greatest achievement, that of converting a wilderness into a highly developed community in such a short time. That is the basic emphasis of the book.

In less than sixty years, the county passed from a primitive wilderness to an advanced and flourishing community. That those who witnessed it were themselves astounded at the progress may be seen in occasional quotes from biographies:

> She [Mrs. Lee] has beheld many changes since first coming here, and can hardly realize that this prosperous region, with its thousands of intellectual inhabitants, and in wealth only second to Wayne, was once a wild and uninhabited section, when land could be bought for a mere song. (pp. 701-2)

> For over 55 years Mr. and Mrs. King have trodden life's pathway together, and beheld with their own eyes the wonderful improvements that have taken place since they first came here. (p. 1401)

This conversion was accomplished by their own hard labor, and of this they were vastly proud. They came, most of them, empty-handed and empty of purse. By their own efforts, and with some mutual cooperation, they did it. The prevailing opinion of respect for these men can be summed up in one sentence about one of them:

> Mr. Davenport is an old pioneer and a worthy member of that noble band. (p. 1394)

The pride in their achievement goes hand in hand with their pride in the community, as it was when they first saw it, and as it was when they were first writing about it. It may well have been "savage and uncultivated land," but it was even then beautiful in its own way. The book abounds in passages which show this clearly. All of these are part poetry and part rhetoric, but the settlers meant it, as amply testified by their own words.

But what about the people who were already in this beautiful land, the Indians? What did the pioneers think about them? It was clear that the settlers simply didn't think very highly of the Indians. It seems to have been taken for granted that it is natural for a more advanced culture to supplant a primitive one, and there is certainly the clear but unspoken opinion that the Indians weren't entitled to the land because they didn't do anything with it.

In the opinion of the settlers, the Indians were lazy (p. 1119) They were, for the most part, peaceful and inoffensive, except when cheated or furnished with liquor by the white man. (pp. 453, 1360) The white women were generally terrified of them, because of their habitual stealth, and their begging. There were also good Indians, like old Okemos, who was practically a household pet.(pp. 899-900) But only in one brief passage (p. 115) is there any expressed feeling that maybe injustice had been done to the Indians. The Victorians were a self-rightous people indeed.

The inhabitants found the country beautiful in its natural state, and they left it beautiful in its cultivated and improved state, or so they firmly believed. As they appreciated its original beauty, they took pride in the finished excellence of their localities, from the State itself on down to their homesites. "The State of Michigan is well known to be one of the healthiest States in the Union." (p. 589) "The county of Washtenaw, one of the fairest and best in the State or nation..." (p. 115) "Like all other intelligent communities in the United States, the people of Washtenaw have participated...in the various political contests that have agitated the country at large..." (p. 243) Judge Lawrence said he had "come to Washtenaw county when it contained but five towns, and had been identified with it ever since; that he considered it, physically, as an old county, and second to none in the Northwest, for which he felt proud." (p. 346) These are some of the comments about Washtenaw. They were even more fervent, and much more detailed, about the smaller units, the townships, cities, and villages of their nearest allegiance.

So they took pride in their work, their own creation. The change was made through their own efforts. From this point we go on to what is unquestionably the strongest article of creed of the people of this book: their strong faith in

the gospel of hard work, their belief that success is the result of honest labor of the individual. This goes through the book like a refrain. Nor were they ashamed of the prosperity brought by their hard labor. Very often they give the value of their farm, sometimes they even tell how much they are worth, and they do not hesitate to say that one of the sons is a "wealthy banker." In the biography of J.D. Baldwin it states that he "married a daughter of Norman Hubbard, a capitalist of Oswego Co., N. Y." (p. 962)

A few quotations will suffice to show that this applied not only to the individual in farming but also to business. "By careful and economical habits, Mr. Mack has come to be one of Ann Arbor's leading merchants." (p. 1017) Luick Bros., carpenters and joiners, "have built up a lucrative business by honesty and integrity." (p. 1016) The Eisele Brothers, monument makers, "by honest and skilful workmanship succeeded in building up a large trade." (p. 984) Nor did they hesitate to draw the necessary conclusions from the reverses.

This leads us to their views on education, an essential ingredient of success. In this also they had an unbounded faith. They were the ones who established on its firm basis our present democratic educational system. It was the natural result of their confidence in themselves. The feeling is very strong that almost to the last man they regretted their lack of educational opportunities, and were certainly determined that their progeny would get the best education possible, better than they themselves had had.

The reasons for their great faith in education are obvious: it helped one to success, it was the basis of a free society. These people took their educational problems seriously, they took their politics that way as well. They were intensely patriotic. This hardly needs documenting, as the book is so full of it, but it might be noted that the first thing the settlers did was to celebrate with eclat the first Independence Day anniversary after their arrival in their new home. (pp. 518, 675, 452-3) The book was published in 1881, and the Civil War, although terminated sixteen years before, remained a most vivid memory. Not a single person who was honored with a biography left out any of the details of his military service. In their remarks on the Civil War, if nowhere else, can their patriotism and especially their devotion to the Union be measured. A whole chapter, 63 pages to be exact, is devoted to Washtenaw County in the war.

Some felt so strongly about the tariff that it is difficult to decide whether it belongs in politics or religion. The unnamed author of the six-page article entitled "Peep into Washtenaw County," has really used this section to expound his tariff doctrines and to prove his point that the tariff has done wonders for certain commodities and is needed on all. (pp. 358-363) An Ypsilanti merchant also knows how effective the tariff can be for him in competing with Canadian industries (p. 1138)

It is quite natural to go from politics to religion and morality, for the Victorians certainly considered them to be related. Perhaps the best example of the Victorian ideal is contained in the following extract:

> The press of the city [Ann Arbor] is well conducted. It is the exponent of American ideas, and the faithful guardian of American interests. The writers are evidently of that class who have risen above flunkeyism, and deal justly by the time in which they live. They oppose their journals to innovation, when such does not give promise of

> good results; they stigmatize moral cowardice, and teach that from the village council room to the chambers of the National Government virtue should be doubly cherished and vice subjected to rebuke and punishment. (p. 880)

Since the Victorians did not think of the Government as rewarding virtue - they would have been horrified at the more recent policies of the government in direct aid of individuals - they expected the government only to "cherish" it. In other words, the individual's own efforts brought the rewards, and it was the function of the government to protect and approve.

> Like his father, the years of Henry White's life have been strewn with the honors attached to an upright and just existence. (p. 1056)

Victorian morality was of course closely related to religious expression, and this is also clearly expressed in various places. The chapter on divorce, for instance, shows the author's attitude:

> Notwithstanding the divine injunction, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder," the courts of the land year by year are called upon to dissolve the marriage tie. Flimsy excuses are invented by husbands and wives who may be tired of one another's company, the courts are appealed to and the command of God disobeyed. (p. 593)

The author of those words is no doubt convinced that people who disobey God's laws will inevitably get the punishment here on earth that they deserve. It is equally clear that the Victorians thought that those who follow the "straight and narrow" will undoubtedly prosper here below and sustain life everlasting as well. That morality is equated with material success is more than implied.

One of the strongest beliefs of the Victorians was a firm conviction of progress. They were sure that there was a Divine plan, that with hard work you succeeded, and the inevitable result was that things must be better after this than before. The idea of progress is also one of the ideas implied throughout the book, and there are many applicable quotations. Thus, in addition to the gospel of hard work, the Victorians equated God and morality with prosperity, progress and happiness.

The actual religious expression of the American Victorians was strongly Christian, and especially Protestant Christian. The people who wrote the book, however, were from the "better classes," so all the religious denominations are treated fairly and objectively. The absence of any tinge of anti-Catholicism and, with one possible exception, of anti-Semitism is noteworthy among a people so staunchly Biblical Protestant. This was probably due to the presence of very few Jews in the community, and because the Irish, who were at that time the backbone of Roman Catholicism, started with just as little, worked just as hard, and came out just as successfully as the rest of the community. Also probably that traditional addiction to whisky was not a whit worse among the Irish than it was among the non-Irish, and the temperance advocates were just as active there, so that would remove the cause for reproach on that score.

The pioneers knew their Bible well. The vast number of Biblical allusions throughout the book are such as to leave no doubt about a real familiarity with every line of it.

The space given to the development of the various religious denominations, the erection and maintenance of their church buildings, indicate the dependence of the average citizen upon the church. However, into the stronghold of Victorian belief, Mr. Darwin with his disturbing doctrine had already penetrated. Prof. Winchell of the University wrote a book to amplify and explain it. (pp. 459-60) The author of that portion of the History of Washtenaw County which discusses Prof. Winchell's book is certainly not hostile to the subject, but commits himself to neither acceptance or rejection. Not so the author of another part of the book who treats it with sarcasm. (p. 129)

At any rate, there was a strong leavening of religious liberalism in the staunch piety of the Victorians, whether it came from the 18th century period of enlightenment, Mr. Darwin's disturbing theory, or the levelling of the frontier. The wealthy Thomas Burkett "erected at his own expense the Dover church...open for worship to all believers in God, irrespective of color, nationality or creed." (p. 728) Elsewhere we read, "Mr. Lithhfield is not a member of any church, but leads a strictly moral and temperate life, and one worthy of imitation in many respects." (p. 702)

Another facet of mid-Victorian culture that engages our attention is the position of women in society. That they would reach their present status is perfectly clear even in the eighties of the last century. The foundations were well laid, the superstructure was certainly close to completion, and the little that was to be done, even though it took decades to do, was inevitable. What created the relatively high position of American women in society? The hardships of the frontier. This is evident throughout the book. Pioneers meant pioneer men and women. They shared the hardships side by side. Without his faithful and hard-working wife at his side, the pioneer man would have found his work very difficult if not impossible. So the leveling quality of the frontier applied not only to class distinctions but also to legal distinctions between the sexes. The biographies are actually those of husband and wife on terms of equality. There isn't even the slightest condescension that can be detected. The absence of any slighting reference to womanhood is remarkable. There are a number of articles written by women, reminiscences in particular. They are just as vigorous in expression and as intellectual as anything the men have written. Why shouldn't they have been? One needs only to read Mrs. Harriet L. Noble's experiences. (pp. 435-6)

Another thing that gives evidence of the position of women is the infinitesimally small number of bachelors who have success stories in the biographical sections. It seems to be obvious that a man without a wife can't make much out of himself. The bachelors that are fortunate enough to have biographies have only a very few lines. But the unspoken disapproval of the bachelor's life is in contrast to the horror of the uxoricide, when Mrs. Lucy Washburne was murdered by her husband. (pp. 1122-3)

Another evidence of the rising status of women in society is the single fact that many of the biographies are of women. One of the remarkable biographies is that of Lettice Smith Holmes of Sylvan Township. She was the wife of a very well known and honorable man, the Rev. Thomas Holmes, at that time pastor of the Congregational Church of Chelsea. She earned a bachelor's degree in two years, half the normal time. She pursued a course in theology in Oberlin College at the side of her husband, when women were not admitted, but she got special permission. She studied and traveled abroad, she painted, she knew several languages, was very widely read, and all in all was a really remarkable woman.

Mrs. Mary E. Foster was Ann Arbor's first woman lawyer. She was married and widowed three times before she was 48 years old. (pp. 993-4) Another characteristic woman leader of the period was Mrs. Helen McAndrew, M.D., who got a whole biography of 29 lines to herself under her own name, while her husband is merely mentioned in the 16 lines given to the firm of McElcheran & McAndrew. (p. 1219)

So women were on the march. Politics, however, was clearly recognized as not woman's sphere. In the biographies, the religious preferences of both husband and wife are given, but I have not found a single instance where the wife's political preference is mentioned.

In another respect, also, women had not yet reached modernity,- the field of health. A few women in the biographies were married more than once, but they are few indeed. However, the majority of the men were married more than once, and not through benefit of the divorce courts but by the hand of what they would call the "grim reaper." This mortality among the women cannot fail to appall the reader of the biographies.

The next logical topic is temperance, for the women were usually pretty active in that movement, somewhat more so than the men, although it was not considered necessarily a woman's sphere. It was of great concern to a woman, though, for a drunken husband was a social disgrace or worse. In the matter of temperance, we have a definite cleavage of opinion. There is ample evidence that on the frontier strong liquor was a medium of exchange, a valuable social adjunct, a medicine, a definite sine qua non. It made the pioneer's hard life bearable. A very early temperance society met with great difficulty. (p. 955. See also pp. 139-40, 524, 553, 663, 809, 844, 853, 1131, 1140, 1200, 1315-16, and 1408)

How the temperance movement had progressed by the eighties can be seen by the number of temperance organizations in Ann Arbor alone. Previous to the time of writing, the Washingtonian movement, the Sons of Temperance, the Maine Law movement, the Woman's Crusade, and the Red Ribbon movement swept over the land and over Ann Arbor, and had passed on. The existing societies in 1881 were: Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Ann Arbor Reform Club, St. Thomas Temperance Benevolent Society, University Temperance Association, University of Michigan branch of the W.C.T.U., Ann Arbor High School Temperance Association, and the Royal Templars of Temperance. (pp. 956-8) By this time, the only drawback to the complete success of the movement was the fanaticism and unreality of the promoters themselves. (pp. 1183-4)

The Victorians may have had their smug and self-righteous side, but all of that was relieved by the fact that they most assuredly had a sense of humor. This is responsible for some of the best reading in the book. The Toledo War, for instance, is the butt of everybody's sarcasm. The official account of this affair is given on pages 76-80, and even here the author cannot refrain from any number of sallies. It is an amazing fact that no one has used this material for a comic opera. The Black Hawk War gets about the same treatment.

Another subject for humor was the real estate speculation. Washtenaw shared in the boom and bust of the thirties and also in the attendant real estate swindles. There were a number of them in Michigan, and a good example from Washtenaw may be found on pp. 721-2. They could poke fun at themselves, and there wasn't very much that was exempt from their humor.

I have given only a few of the possible samples of conscious humor in the book and there are many others. Now we turn to the unconscious humor, the things they slipped on. A few humorous slips make amusimg reading:

> He /Norman C. Goodale/ married Appama Burnett, but death came to her release. (p. 893)
>
> He /Roswell Preston/ toiled upon his farm to make comfortable and happy a pioneer home until 1837, when he was married. (p. 1270)
>
> Dr. Edward S. Dunster of Ann Arbor was in the Civil War, practiced in Ann Arbor, and held the chair of obstetrics at the University of Michigan. One of his papers is entitled "Comparative Morality in Armies from Wounds and Diseases." (. 983)

It is, however, a real tribute to the hard work done on this volume that there are so few errors of this kind in it.

We tend to think of Victorian oratory in terms of florid, verbose, and long-winded language. It is true that there was a lot of it, but there are indications that it was going out of style, that it was a leftover from an earlier period, and that those who indulged in it were regarded as old-fashioned. They may have treated the speaker with amused tolerance, but they certainly poked a lot of fun at verbose oratory. The Webster Township picnickers at Independance Lake, on the Fourth of July, had a good time, even though "they had no orator, none of the spread-eagle eloquence, none of the boast and braggadocio common to such occasions!" (p. 675) So the early settlers themselves joked about bombast.

We often think of Victorians, also, as habitually clothing their words, both written and spoken, in flowery language not unlike their oratory. While that may be true to some extent, they could be outspoken and blunt at times. Many examples may be found, as in the frank appraisal of Capt. and Mrs. Dix, who brought their Boston manner into the wilds. (pp. 1066 & 1071)

One tendency of older people is to look upon the time of their youth through rose-colored glasses and to portray it as an ideally happy time, in comparison with which modern days are degenerate. How much of this is displayed in the History? Surprisingly enough, very little if any. For the most part, the older people looked back on their trials and hardships realistically. The account of the pioneer's cabin and way of life, on pages 137-140, is completely factual and not in the least given to romanticization of the situation. Maybe there were some things better - "The family establishment cost but little labor, nothing more" - so they balanced their family budget more successfully than their successors could. But there were too many other things that had improved for these people to do much weeping about the change.

What about the seamy side, the chasing after the almighty dollar, the busy and deceitful world, the crooked people to which but brief reference was made? It certainly existed, for there are enough references to it, even though some of them are brief. There are ample accounts of murders, the gory details of which are given with the proper horror and disapproval. In one of them, one of the murderers was tried, "and, on the testimony of a woman supposed to be a harlot, was convicted of murder, and sentenced to imprisonment for life." (p. 762) This is the only mention in the book of a member of the "world's oldest profession," and are we supposed to believe that there was no prostitution in Washtenaw? Evidence that it was quite otherwise is ample from other sources. It was a public scandal that not many years before the book was written, there was a riot in A nn Arbor that caused the

temporary closing of a house of prostitution that had been openly operating in Ann Arbor for years, right across the street from the courthouse and jail, and it was only one of a large number in the city. What about general order and obedience to law? If you read the section on Ann Arbor, you would notice the complete absence of lawlessness and would be forced to conclude that it was a model city. Other accounts indicate otherwise. The writer of the section on Ypsilanti is much more honest. We have already seen that Rev. Mr. Wead thought the place pretty bad. There were the "River Kings" in the mid-1820's, who terrorized the countryside from their position opposite Woodruff's Grove. (p. 1117) Both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti needed and had vigilante societies. During the national depression of 1838, many malcontents committed robberies and other depredations. (pp. 1119-20) Ypsilanti also had trouble with the first negro resident, who vowed that he would allow no other negro to settle in Ypsilanti and caused many a disturbance on that account. (pp. 1125-6) There were well known horse-thieves (p. 1126), and Ypsilanti also had counterfeiters. (p. 1121) In Sharon Township, also, law officers were once stampeded and met with boiling starch. (p. 1304) So there is evidence that disobedience to law and general disorder did exist.

There are approximately 1500 biographies in the book, totaling those at the end of each section of the twenty township histories. Since most of the people chosen were heads of families, one may conclude that a total of about 12,500 persons were represented, out of a population of 42,000. While it does not indicate that the remaining three-fourths were in the non-prosperous class (my own four grandparents are not listed, and they were substantial citizens living in Washtenaw at the time), it certainly shows that the book is definitely made up by and for the minority known as the "better classes." This, I think, is the key to the book: it represents the opinions, ideas, and ideals of the dominant, public-opinion forming and vocal minority of the population. One of the strong tenets of Victorian philosophy was that "virtue should be encouraged and vice suppressed." The Victorians knew of the presence of vice, intemperance, and crime, drunkenness, laziness, and stinginess, but they weren't going to advertise it.

In closing, there is perhaps just one more striking thing about the biographies in this book: the men are jacks-of-all-trades, as one had to be to exist on the frontier. How different their checkered lives were from our well-ordered, well-regulated, secure ones, most of which fall into a rather regular pattern.

The Dixboro Ghost

by Russell E. Bidlack

(Two papers read by Professor Bidlack at the October, 1962, meeting of the Society.)

The village of Dixboro, though founded some 136 years ago, has rarely been the subject of national attention. In fact, the only time that most people lacking a Washtenaw County connection have even heard of the place was during the latter half of the 1840's. It was then that lovers of the mysterious all over the country learned that "a spiritual visitant in all the accoutrements and habiliments of mortality" had made its appearance in this little Michigan community. Such was the interest in the DIXBORO GHOST that the first newspaper published in Council Bluffs, Iowa, devoted one-fourth of its first issue to an article on the subject.[1] This account, authored in 1846 by someone who claimed to have been "A Spectator" to the strange event, had been reprinted in one newspaper after another for three years, but was still considered news in Iowa in 1849.

The story of the Dixboro Ghost can best be told by first relating the events that led up to its appearance.

Sometime prior to 1830, two brothers names James and John Mulholland emigrated from Ireland to America. They settled in Dixboro, then a tiny village of perhaps a dozen houses, a grist mill, and a general store. They were thrifty and hard-working, according to the anonymous author who called himself A SPECTATOR, and their neighbors soon came to consider them as "well to do in this world." The two brothers worked as partners and, as the years passed, they acquired a number of valuable tracts of land which they owned jointly.

James Mulholland was married when he came to Dixboro, and, from several deeds involving the sale of land, we know that his wife's name was Ann. During the summer of 1835, Ann's sister, an attractive widow named Martha Crawford, with her small son, Joseph, came from her home in Canada to visit her Michigan relatives. Soon after her arrival, young John Mulholland, according to A SPECTATOR, "conceived a strong attachment" for the Widow Crawford, and, "as the attachment proved to be mutual," the consequence was that she consented to be his wife. The fact that Martha Crawford was a woman of property as well as feminine charm may help to account for John's "attachment."

Prior to Martha's visit, her sister, Ann Mulholland, had "been gradually settling into a gloomy and melancholy state." "All could see," recalled A SPECTATOR "that some secret care was wasting away the joyous spring of her existence." What this "secret care" that "haunted her sleepless nights" may have been remains a mystery, although in later years it was whispered that Ann carried to her grave an "untold tale of crime and cruelty in him whom she loved." Untold, according to A SPECTATOR, except to one other person. When Ann realized that her sister, Martha, had agreed to marry John Mulholland, she tried in every way to dissuade her, but to no avail. It was then that Ann shared her awful secret. Immediately, Martha's love for John Mulholland turned to loathing, her admiration to disgust, and she prepared to return to Canada. Learning of her plan, the Mulholland brothers attempted to dissuade her, but found that "she remained firm in her resolve." Her brother-in-law then resorted to a more convincing argument. If she refused to marry his brother, James Mulholland promised that she would never reach Canada alive.

Although we have only the statements of A SPECTATOR on these family affairs, it is a matter of record in the Washtenaw County Courthouse that on September 11, 1835, John Mulholland and Martha Crawford were married by a justice of the peace named Esak Pray. Records also support A SPECTATOR's statement that Ann died soon after her sister's marriage. James Mulholland married again in 1838.

Whether Martha's marriage was as unhappy as her sister feared, we do not know. It did not last long, however, for on June 2, 1840, John died. The one child that was born to this union, a son, died soon after his father. According to A SPECTATOR John Mulholland was "much out of health" for some weeks before his death and, fearing "he could not much longer remain an inhabitant of this world," was anxious that a division be made of the property that he and his brother held in common. Deeds recorded in the Washtenaw County Courthouse reveal that such a division was made on May 20, 1840.

Following her husband's death, Martha Mulholland continued to live in Dixboro with her son by her first marriage, Joseph Crawford. Since John had failed to leave a will, Martha was appointed administratrix of his estate, and three neighbors, Mathew N. Tillotson, Jabez Hawkins, and Frederick P. Townson, were ordered by the Probate Court to assist in preparing an inventory. A year later, however, James Mulholland petitioned the Court to issue a new warrant of appraisal, since Martha had taken no action. He added that he himself was the principal creditor of his brother's estate. In August, 1842, Martha requested the Court to appoint a new administrator because she herself had become incompetent. Although on previous occasions she had signed her name in a clear hand, she signed this document by mark.

An explanation for Martha's inaction is provided by A SPECTATOR. She appears to have developed an illness similar to that of her dead sister. She was "melancholy and downcast, as if laboring under the dread of some secret danger. . .and often waked from her troubled sleep, frightened with horrid dreams. . .Frequently she would arouse herself from her slumber with cries and exclamations, shuddering and exhausted, as if endeavoring to escape some imminent danger." A SPECTATOR further tells us that "vague suspicions began to float among her neighbors, and former rumors. . .were revived." Furthermore, she was "often subjected to the ill usage of her brother-in-law, who seemed to take every opportunity to make her life as full of trouble as possible." It was the opinion of many of the neighbors that James Mulholland's "only study was, how he might possess himself of the property which had been possessed by his brother and was now in the possession of his unfortunate widow."

As the years passed, Martha's health continued to decline and she became more and more an object of pity in the neighborhood. Although the record is unclear on this point, it appears that she was attended by a medical friend of her brother-in-law's, a peddler who carried a stock of patent medicines. Finally in the summer of 1845, she was attended by a physician whom A SPECTATOR identified only as Dr. D---. Since a bill was later submitted by Ann Arbor's Dr. Samuel Denton, it seems probable that Dr. Denton was Dr. D---. According to A SPECTATOR, Dr. D--- found Martha's symptoms such as he could not account for -- that her state frequently approached insanity. She complained of incessant pain in the stomach and chest, which she believed to have been caused by drugs administered earlier, and insisted upon seeing Dr. D--- alone. She then informed the good doctor that she had a proposition to make, explaining that she "had long been laboring under the misery of concealing something which she was anxious to divulge before she died." However, because she did not wish to survive the disclosure, she demanded that Dr. D--- agree to bleed her to death in exchange for the secret -- the secret that had

been the cause of her sister's death, and now her own. To humor her, Dr. D--- consented. He listened to her ghastly story, apparently dismissing it as the nightmare of a woman insane, but pretended that his lancet was broken when it came his turn to fulfill the bargain. Bursting into what A SPECTATOR called "most pitiable lamentations," Martha cried: "They will murder, they will kill me." Dr. D--- then pledged himself to keep her secret, and she became calm enough for him to depart,

An incident occurred the night before Martha's death that was to have later significance. Somehow, she found her way to the house of one of her close neighbors where she fell into what was described as a fit of delirium. Her brother-in-law carried her home and, believing that she was breathing her last, he cried out: "She is dying. She will die."

Were it not for subsequent events, we might close our sketch of Martha Mulholland by saying that on a summer day in 1845 she found in death the peace of mind that she had failed to find in life. But this is not the end of her story.

At this point, a new character makes his appearance. Isaac Van Woert, a resident of Livingston County, New York, set out by covered wagon for Ann Arbor in September, 1845. Van Woert was a carpenter by trade, and he had heard that Ann Arbor was a prosperous community where his services would be in demand. He was accompanied by his wife and two little boys. As the Van Woerts passed through Dixboro on September 24, they noticed the unfinished frame of a house. Enquiring whether the owner might be in need of a carpenter, Van Woert was directed to Jackson Hawkins, who immediately hired him to complete the structure. Since the family needed a place to live during Van Woert's temporary employment, Hawkins summoned a fifteen-year-old boy who was unloading stone from a cart and asked whether his mother's house was available for rent. The boy was Joseph Crawford, Martha Mulholland's son by her first marriage. He answered in the affirmative, and by evening the Van Woerts were settled in the house in which Martha had died a few weeks earlier.

What happened next can best be told by quoting from a sworn statement made by Van Woert before William Perry, a justice of the peace, at Ann Arbor, on December 8, 1845. This deposition was printed in a number of newspapers, including the Ann Arbor <u>True Democrat</u> of February 12, 1846.

> On Saturday night, the 27th of September, between 7 and 8 o'clock I was standing in front of the window of said house; my wife had stepped into Mrs. Hammond's about two rods distant, my two little boys were in the back yard, for I had just passed through the house /to the front yard/ and was combing my hair, when I saw a light through the window. I put my hand on the window sill and looked in. I saw a woman with a candlestick in her hand in which was a candle burning. She held it in her left hand. She was a middling sized woman; had a white cloth around her head, her right hand clasped in her clothes near the waist. She was a little bent forward, her eyes large and much sunken, very pale indeed; her lips projected and her teeth showed some. She moved slowly across the floor until she entered the bedroom and the door closed. I then went up and opened the bedroom door, and all was dark. I stepped forward and lighted a candle with a match, looked forward but saw no one, nor heard any noise, except just before I opened the bedroom door I thought I heard one of the bureau drawers open and shut.

I spoke of what I had seen several days after, and then learned for the first time that the house in which I then lived had been previously occupied by a widow Mulholland, and that she died there.

The second time I saw her was in October about one o'clock in the morning. I got up, started to go out of the back door. As I opened the bedroom door it was light in the outer room. I saw no candle, but I saw the same woman that I had seen before. I was about five feet from her. She said, "Don't touch me -- touch me not." I stepped back a little and asked her what she wanted. She said, "He has got it. He robbed me little by little, until they kilt me! They kilt me! Now he has got it all." I then asked her who had it all. She said, "James, James, yes James has got it at last, but it won't do him long. Joseph! Oh! Joseph. I wish Joseph would come away." Then all was dark and still.

The third time I saw her I awoke in the night, know not what hour, the bedroom was entirely light. I saw no candle, but saw the same woman. She said, "James can't hurt me any more. No! he can't. I am out of his reach. Why don't they get Joseph away? Oh, my boy! Why not come away?" And all was dark and still.

The fourth time I saw her was about eleven o'clock P.M. I was sitting with my feet on the stove hearth. My family had retired and I was eating a lunch when all at once the front door stood open, and I saw the same woman in the door, supported in the arms of a man whom I knew. She was stretched back and looked as if she was in the agonies of death. She said nothing, but the man said, "She is dying. She will die." And all disappeared and the door closed without noise.

The fifth time I saw her was a little after sunrise. I came out of the house to go to my work and I saw the same woman in the front yard. She said, "I wanted Joseph to keep my papers, but they are -----" Here something seemed to stop her utterance. Then she said, "Joseph! Joseph! I fear something will befall my boy." And all was gone.

The sixth time I saw her was near midnight. It was the same woman standing in the bedroom. The room was again light as before, no candle was visible. I looked at my wife, fearing she might awake. She then raised her hand and said, "She will not awake." She seemed to be in great pain; she leaned over and grasped her bowels in one hand and in the other held a phial containing a liquid. I asked her what it was. "The Doctor said it was Balm of Gilead," she replied, and all disappeared.

The seventh time I saw her, I was working at a little bench, which was standing in the room, and which I worked on evenings. I saw the same woman. "I wanted to tell James something, but I could not, I could not." I asked her what she wanted to tell. "Oh, he did an awful thing to me." I asked her who did. "The man they would not let me have, she answered. I asked her what he did. "Oh! He gave me a great deal of trouble in my mind," she replied. "Oh! They kilt me! They kilt me!" she repeated several times. I walked forward and tried to reach her, but she kept the same distance from me. I asked

her if she had taken anything that had killed her. She answered, "Oh, I don't ---- Oh, I don't ----" the froth in her mouth seemed to stop her utterance. Then she said, "Oh, they kilt me." I asked her, "Who killed you?" "I will show you," she said. Then she went out of the back door near the fence, and I followed her. There I saw two men whom I knew, standing. They looked cast down and dejected. I saw them begin at the feet and melt down like lead melting, until they were entirely melted; then a blue blaze two inches thick burned over the surface of the melted mass. Then all began bubbling up like lime slacking. I turned to see where the woman was, but she was gone. I looked back again and all was gone and dark.

The next time I saw the woman was in the back yard, about five o'clock P.M. She said, "I want you to tell James to repent. Oh! if he would repent. But he won't, he can't. John was a bad man," and muttered something I could not understand. She then said, "Do you know where Frain's Lake is?" She then asked another question of much importance, and said "Don't tell of that." [Van Woert later revealed that this latter question pertained to a well at the corner of Main and Mill Streets, near Martha Mulholland's house.]

I asked her if I should inform the public on the two men that she said had killed her. She replied, "There will be a time. The time is coming. The time will come. But oh, their end! Their end! Their wicked end!" She muttered something about Joseph, and all was dark.

The last time I saw her was on the sixth of November, about midnight, in the bedroom. She was dressed in white; her hands hung down by her side; she stood very straight and looked very pale. She said, "I don't want anybody here, I don't want anybody here," and muttered over something I did not understand, except now and then the word Joseph. She then said, "I wanted to tell a secret, and I thought I had." And all was gone and dark. [It should be interjected here that on the following day, the Van Woerts moved out of Martha's house.]

In all her conversation, she used the Irish accent; intermixed in all her conversation was the expression very often repeated, "They have kilt me, Oh, they have kilt me!" and also the name Joseph.

The above was duly sworn to before William Perry, Esq., at Ann Arbor, Dec. 8th, 1845.

When Van Woert's deposition was made public, there was an immediate demand that the body of Martha Mulholland be disinterred, in part to see whether it was still in its grave (it was), and further to determine whether she had been poisoned. According to the Ypsilanti Sentinel of January 14, 1846,[2] a coroner's inquest was held which, "irrespective of the apparition, found a verdict that the deceased came to her death by poison administered by some person to them unknown." This discovery, along with the fact that Van Woert had first seen the ghost before he had ever heard of Martha Mulholland, and that his description of the ghost exactly matched that of the deceased, convinced most residents of Dixboro that the apparition was real. A careful search of Frain's Lake, and an examination of the well at the corner of Main and Mill Streets, however, revealed nothing.

Some, of course, believed that Van Woert had imagined his ghostly encounters. The editor of the Ann Arbor True Democrat, however, noted that Van Woert was "a man of good character, a mechanic, and a member of the Methodist Church."[3] Furthermore, he was "a grandson of the illustrious Van Woert, one of the men who captured /Major/ Andre during the Revolution." Since this was a day when phrenology was in vogue, Van Woert submitted to the examination of his skull by "several eminent phrenologists." Their report was that he "inclined to the bilious," and it was recognized that seeing apparitions is not an unusual occurence among the bilious.

The person most affected by Van Woert's deposition was, of course, James Mulholland. Although he could be charged with no specific crime, his neighbors looked at him with accusing eyes and there were whispered threats and subtle suggestions that he leave Washtenaw County. The unnamed doctor, or medicine peddler, who had supplied Martha with the "Balm of Gilead" before Dr. D--- took over her case, also found himself increasingly unpopular in the county.

Both peddler and James Mulholland disappeared early in 1846 and were never heard from again. A deed recorded in the Washtenaw County Courthouse reveals that James Mulholland's property was sold at a sheriff's sale in 1852. Meanwhile, Joseph Crawford, Martha's son by her first husband, came into possession of his mother's property and was listed on the 1850 census of Superior Township as a farmer, 21 years of age, and possessing property valued at $1,000.

No record has been found to reveal what became of Isaac Van Woert. He had left Washtenaw County by 1850.

Did Martha Mulholland's ghost return to Dixboro to save her son and destroy her murderers? As late as 1881, according to the county history published that year, many were still inclined to believe the story, but we are told that by that date a majority ascribed "the cause of all this excitement and trouble to a well-laid conspiracy," having for its object the banishment of James Mulholland and his medical friend.[4] If this were the fact, the conspirators certainly succeeded.

Notes

1. The Frontier Guardian, February 7, 1849. A SPECTATOR called his piece "The Dixboro Ghost, being a full exposition of all the facts relating to the Dixboro Ghost, which is said to have appeared in Dixboro, Washtenaw Co., Michigan." In his account, he referred to none of the individuals by name, but rather by initials followed by dashes. Other newspapers of the time, the papers settling the estate of John Mulholland on file in the Washtenaw County Courthouse, deeds also on file, and the History of Washtenaw County published in 1881, make possible the identity of all persons involved in the case except the mysterious medicine peddler.

2. The account of "The Dixboro Apparition" that appeared in the Ypsilanti Sentinel of January 14, 1846, was republished from a clipping saved by John Geddes in the Ann Arbor Courier of April 25, 1873.

3. Ann Arbor True Democrat, February 12, 1846.

4. History of Washtenaw County, Michigan (Chicago: Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1881), p. 1073.

The Skeleton in the Wall
or The Meaning of "A.F.D."
by Russell E. Bidlack

During the spring of 1886, the brick jail that had served Ann Arbor for half a century was replaced by a more modern and commodious structure. he old jail property was sold to John J. Robison, the Deputy County Clerk of Washtenaw, who engaged a crew of workmen to tear it down. The citizenry watched the removal of the massive brick and iron walls with considerable interest, especially after a workman reported having found a complete set of burglar's tools in a chink in one wall. Another claimed to have found a roll of bills, which turned out to be counterfeits. But the most startling discovery was announced in the Ann Arbor Register of Thursday, April 1, 1886. (For a clear understanding of subsequent events, it is important to keep this date in mind -- Thursday, April 1, 1886.)

The Register reported that on a previous afternoon, Robison's son, Charles, had, in the absence of one of the workmen, taken a hand in the demolition. Young Robison ascended a ladder to the second story where the women's ward had been enclosed. There he began removing bricks and sliding them down a plank to the cleaners below. The Register described in some detail what happened next.

> While engaged in this work, Robison pulled out a brick which revealed behind it a sort of hole or cache in the wall which had either been left purposely by its original builders, or -- what seemed more probable -- had been dug out by some temporary lodger in the women's ward.
>
> Mr. Robison was struck by the curious position of the hole and the deftness with which its existence had been concealed from either the outside or inside. He immediately proceeded to explore the dark recess, without, however, saying anything to the workmen below or betraying the fact that he had made a "find." Reaching his hand in, he encountered something which felt like a ball of some kind, but which upon being brought to light proved to be a whitened skull.
>
> Mr. Robison is not a physician, but a superficial examination of the wasted and whitened skull sufficed to show him that it had once belonged to a very young if not a newly born infant. The widely opened sutures and the places left by the wasting away of its cartilaginous formation, showed clearly that the brain, whose home the skull had once been, had never existed long enough to attain any degree of intelligence.
>
> Without stopping to ponder over these and similar questions, however, Mr. Robison at once proceeded to investigate farther. One by one the remaining bones of the skeleton werebrought to light. Mr. Robison was naturally much excited by his strange discovery, but he retained his composure sufficiently to wrap the bones in paper and take them home. He also took good care that the matter should be kept secret until the proper officers should have an opportunity to investigate. Early this morning he made a thorough investigation of the hole and its surroundings, without, however, discovering anything more of importance, except some pieces of rotted cloth and a plain gold ring. This latter bears on its inner surface the inscription "A.F.D., 1850" in fancy lettering.
>
> The particulars of the "find" spread rapidly this morning and not even the oldest inhabitant is able to solve the mystery thus brought

to light. A Register reporter hastily interviewed some of the old timers this morning, but no one knew of any occurrence in the old jail which would explain the finding of a skeleton in the wall. Mr. Robison has brought the bones down to the county clerk's office where many curious citizens have already viewed them. Further developments will be given next week.

From the report appearing in the Register on April 8, one week later, we learn that the announcement of this ghastly discovery came as a shock to virtually every one in the community. Those who had lived in the county for many years pondered over the initials "A.F.D." To what unfortunate woman had they belonged, and might she still be living in their midst? The Register had indeed scored a scoop, and no one was more concerned than Rice Beal, editor of the Register's chief rival, the Ann Arbor Courier.

One of the most surprised readers of the account was William Walsh, the "shrewd and worthy sheriff" of Washtenaw County. Not a little upset that he should have learned of the discovery through the press, Sheriff Walsh hurried to the Court House to begin an investigation. Dr. John Kapp, Ann Arbor's Mayor, arrived breathlessly at about the same time, and close behind them came Dr. W. B. Smith, one of the town's oldest physicians. Demanding to see the bones, Dr. Smith said he might be able to shed some light on the subject, because he vaguely remembered attending a pregnant woman in the jail about 1850. "He thought he could find it on his books if necessary."

Dick Kearns, the Register of Deeds, appeared. The first hint that anyone had that the whole story of Robison's discovery had not been told in the Register came when Kearns asked whether any one of those assembled had ever heard of the initials "A.F.D." All shook their heads except Robison, who said that the only thing he had ever heard that these initials stood for was "All Fools' Day." Dick Kearns smiled faintly, turned, and hurried back down the hall. The others paid no attention and insisted that Robison show them the bones.

Robison then took the sheriff "solemnly by the arm, and led him slowly into the inner office, where he cautiously uncovered a large box." The Register of April 8 tells us that "Mr. Walsh eagerly lifted the paper which hid the terrible sight from his eyes and disclosed -- a miscellaneous collection of beef and mutton bones with the meat still hanging to them in shreds." Sheriff Walsh said not a word, according to the Register, "but slowly walked out of the room in a dazed condition."

The Mayor's turn came next. As he gazed into the box, a smile slowly spread across his face as he suddenly realized the meaning of "A.F.D." As he stepped back, the Mayor whispered to Dr. Smith, who was impatiently awaiting his turn, that the bones looked to him more like those of an old man than a baby. A few minutes later Dr. Smith left the Court House with a rather red face. Rice Beal, publisher of the Courier, appeared and rather sheepishly asked to view the remains, explaining that it was a newspaper man's duty to report the news. "Even on April Fools' Day?" asked the Mayor.

So the visitors streamed in all day. Most of them apparently kept the secret from their friends until they, too, could be fooled. The Register's greatest glee came, however, when Chris Beul, editor of Ann Arbor's German newspaper, the Deutsche Hausfreund, innocently included an announcement of the discovery in his paper of Friday, April 2. "It's a cold day," laughed the Register, "when Chris gets left out on the news."